



The Battle of Nashville

The Decisive Battle of the Civil War December 15-16, 1864



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A Non-Profit Organization Dedicated to Preserve, Study, and Open to the Public, Sites Relating to the Battle of Nashville

The Battle of Nashville, fought Dec. 15-16, 1864, was the last major battle of the Civil War and a decisive victory for the Union, commanded by Maj. Gen. George H. Thomas.

The Army of Tennessee under Gen. John Bell Hood had approached the city in early December after horrendous losses at the Battle of Franklin. They formed a line south of the city and waited for the Federals to attack, suffering from the cold winter weather and the lack of food.

Despite forceful urgings from U.S. Grant in Washington to immediately engage the enemy, Thomas waited two weeks to strike, lingering while he reinforced his cavalry and waited out the ice storms.

Then, on the foggy morning of Thurs., Dec. 15, Union forces, including many U.S. Colored Troops, hit the Rebel right flank. Although the attack was unsuccessful, it was a diversionary tactic.

The main attack came in a vast, wheeling movement westward and then southward from the Union defensive lines against the

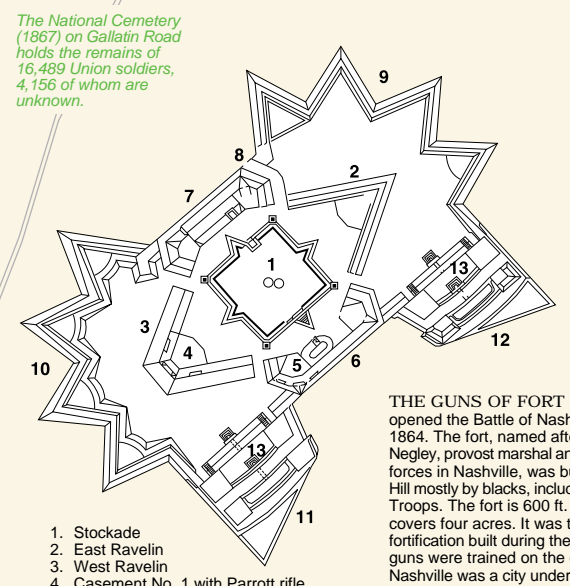
fortified Rebel left flank. Five small forts or redoubts fought fiercely but were eventually overrun by superior numbers of bluecoats. As dusk neared, the Rebels fell back two miles to establish a second line of defense, anchored on the left at Shy's Hill and on the right at Peach Orchard Hill.

Again, on Dec. 16, the Federals hit the Rebel right flank, which held fast. Then, following a terrific artillery barrage, the Union assaulted Shy's Hill and the U.S. Cavalry managed to sweep behind the Rebel lines. Blasted from three sides, the Confederate positions crumbled, and the men in gray fled southward in retreat.

The brave and proud Army of Tennessee had been routed and, for all practical purposes, destroyed.

Today, there is no official Battlefield Park at Nashville. Most of the battlefield is now the western and southern suburbs of the city. Several significant, yet undeveloped, sites remain.

History-minded citizens are attempting to preserve what is left of the battleground.



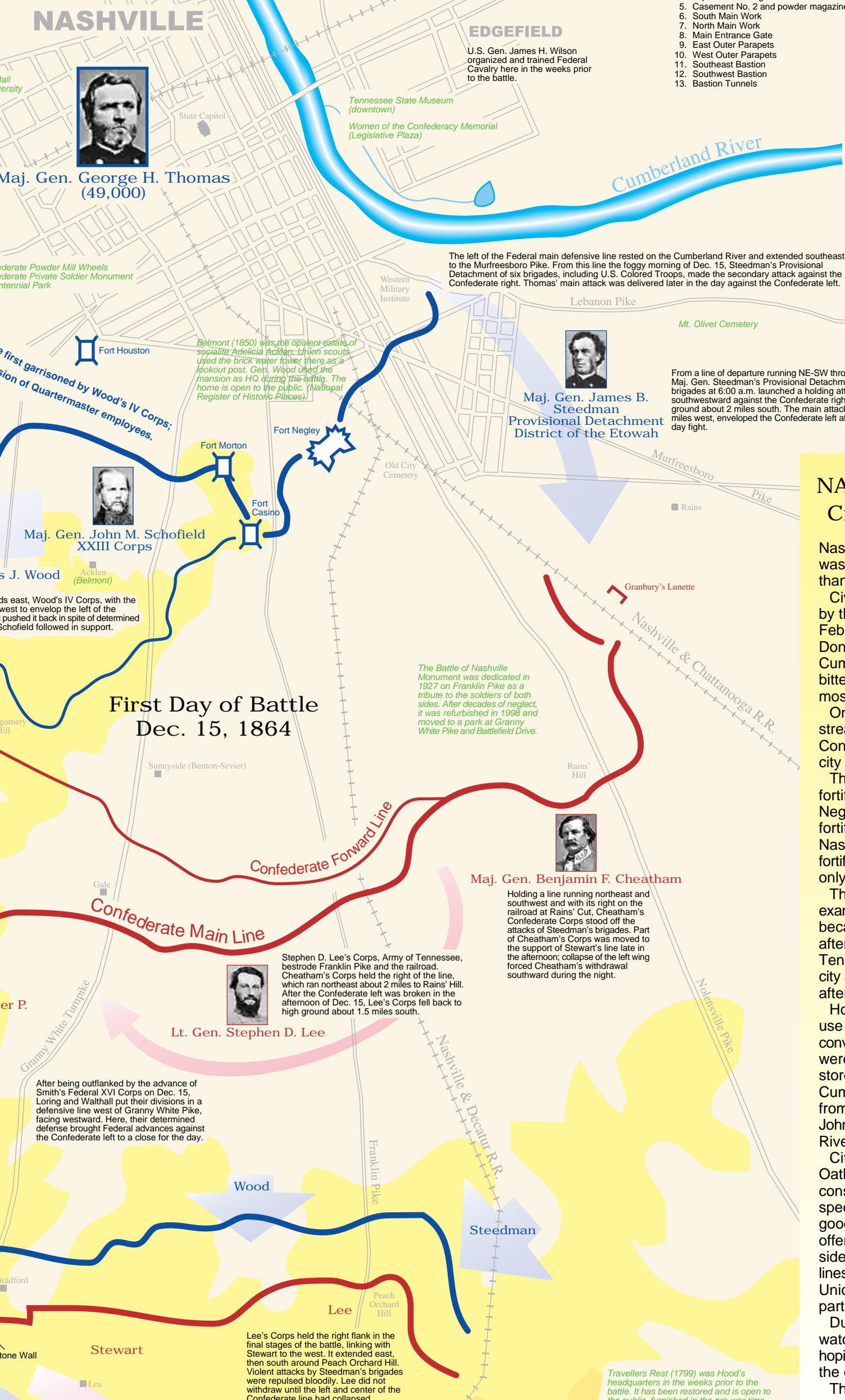
THE GUNS OF FORT NEGLEY opened the Battle of Nashville on December 15, 1864. The fort, named after U.S. Gen. James S. Negley, provost marshal and commander of Federal forces in Nashville, was built in 1862 on St. Cloud Hill mostly by blacks, including 13,000 U.S. Colored Troops. The fort is 600 ft. long, 300 ft. wide, and covers four acres. It was the largest inland stone fortification built during the war. Some of its eleven guns were trained on the city itself; evidence that Nashville was a city under occupation during most of the war.

The State Capitol (1859), designed by William Strickland in the Greek Revival style, was converted into Fort Johnson during the war, named after Andrew Johnson, military governor of occupied Tennessee. The building still houses the State Legislature and Governor's Office, and public tours are available.

Most of the city's churches were converted into military hospitals for the wounded, including the Downtown Presbyterian Church (left) and St. Mary's Cathedral, located in downtown Nashville.

Fortified swing-span railroad bridge over the Cumberland River.

U.S. Gen. James H. Wilson organized and trained Federal Cavalry here in the weeks prior to the battle.



First Day of Battle Dec. 15, 1864

Second Day of Battle Dec. 16, 1864

Bell's Bend (9 miles west of Nashville) CSA Col. D.C. Kelley and Gen. N.B. Forrest's old regiment with four guns fought the U.S. Navy in six separate engagements at Bell's Bend, effectively blockading all Cumberland River traffic, including seven heavily armed gunboats (two of which were the City Class monitors *Neshoba* and *Carondelet*), for two weeks prior to the battle.

Forming the outer arc of the main Federal attack on Dec. 15, R.W. Johnson's 8th Cavalry Division, Wilson's Corps, hit Rucker's Confederate Cavalry Brigade here, west of Richland Creek. Rucker moved west out Charlotte Pike to Bell's Bend. On Dec. 16, Rucker moved south and then east through Bellevue.

In position northward along high ground, Ector's Brigade of French's Confederate Division, commanded by Col. Daniel Coleman, outposted the left of Hood's line. Attacked by the Federal XVI Corps, supported by artillery and part of the Cavalry Corps, it was overwhelmed. It withdrew southeast to Hillsboro Pike.

Belle Meade (1853) is called the "Queen of Tennessee Plantations." Rebel cavalry and Union infantry clashed on the grounds the first day of battle. The plantation is open to the public. (National Register of Historic Places.)

Redoubt No. 4, garrisoned by Lumsden's Battery of smoothbore Napoleons and supported by 100 men of the 28th Alabama Infantry under Capt. Foster, was finally overrun by the assault of 12 infantry and 4 dismounted cavalry regiments, supported by four Federal batteries.

Hood's Redoubt No. 5 was on this hill. Couch's division of the XXIII Corps, sweeping to the south of the route of Smith's XVI, captured it and the hills to the east late in the afternoon of Dec. 15. Wilson's cavalry, crossing the highway about 2 miles south, advanced rapidly eastward, flanking the Confederate defenses.

Hood's Advance

In September 1864, Gen. William T. Sherman's army marched into Atlanta, Ga. and began to prepare for their March to the Sea.

Gen. John Bell Hood and his Army of Tennessee headed north and west, disrupting Sherman's supply and communications lines. Then Hood developed a bold plan—mount an offensive northward against Union-occupied Middle Tennessee and Nashville.

The Confederates arrived at Nashville on December 2, but not before suffering horrendous losses at Franklin on Nov. 30, when Hood recklessly attacked fortified Union positions manned by troops of Gen. John M. Schofield. This had come a day after Schofield's troops slipped miraculously through a trap set by Hood at Spring Hill.

At Nashville, Hood positioned his men in an over-extended four-mile-wide arc south of town and waited for the Federals to attack. He sent his best cavalry officer, Gen. N.B. Forrest, to Murfreesboro to attack the garrison there and to rip up railroad track.

The soldiers suffered greatly in the winter weather, many having no shoes and most having little to eat. The week before the battle there was a severe ice storm which delayed military activities.

In a unique confrontation, Rebel cavalry west of town used artillery to prevent heavily armed Union ironclads on the Cumberland River from reaching Nashville.

Then, on a foggy morning, the battle began.

In the opening phase of the battle, mounted and dismounted cavalry of Wilson's Corps moved out of the Federal works at Charlotte Pike, supporting the advance of Smith's XVI Corps in a turning movement against the extreme left flank of the Confederate positions.

Supported by a division of Wilson's cavalry, Smith's XVI Corps moved westward astride Hardin Road, displacing Ector's Confederate Brigade from positions across the pike northward to the west of Richland Creek. This brigade outposted the Confederate left flank; the main line was along Hillsboro Pike.

Maj. Gen. T.J. Wood led an assault by his IV Corps against the Confederate skirmish line on Montgomery Hill, eventually carrying it. Wood was unable to take it by direct assault, the divisions of Loring and Walthall holding fast until the XVI Corps, moving past their left, forced withdrawal.

Stewart's Confederate Corps held this salient of the left of Hood's defenses. A thin infantry line ran south behind a stone wall on the east side of the pike. After the routing of Ector's Brigade on Hardin Pike and successive overrunning of Redoubts 3, 4 & 5 to the south, Stewart's position was flanked; he withdrew southeast toward Granny White Pike at about 4 p.m.

Redoubt No. 3 in the Confederate system of detached works beyond the main line was overrun Dec. 15 by the enveloping attack of Wood's IV Corps from the northwest.

After being outflanked by the advance of Smith's Federal XVI Corps on Dec. 15, Loring and Walthall put their divisions in a defensive line west of Granny White Pike, facing westward. Here, their determined defense brought Federal advances against the Confederate left to a close for the day.

Coordinated with attacks by Schofield's XXIII Corps, Smith's Federal XVI Corps attacked southward along Granny White Pike. Pressure was applied by Wilson's encircling cavalry to the south. After violent artillery bombardment, McArthur's Division took Shy's Hill about 4:00 p.m., precipitating the route of Hood's Army. The hill is named for Col. W.M. Shy, 20th TN Inf., killed in the desperate defense which he commanded.

The left of the Federal main defensive line rested on the Cumberland River and extended southeast to the Murfreesboro Pike. From this line the foggy morning of Dec. 15, Steedman's Provisional Detachment of six brigades, including U.S. Colored Troops, made the secondary attack against the Confederate right. Thomas' main attack was delivered later in the day against the Confederate left.

Fort Houston, Belmont (1850) was the opulent estate of socialite Anetika Walker. Union soldiers used the brick water tower (now a park lookout post). Gen. Wood used the mansion as HQ during the battle. The home is open to the public. (National Register of Historic Places.)

Using the defensive salient 500 yards east, Wood's IV Corps, with the XVI Corps on its right, swung southwest to envelop the left of the Confederate line, 1.5 miles south, and pushed back in spite of determined resistance. The XXIII Corps under Schofield followed in support.

Stephens D. Lee's Corps, Army of Tennessee, bestrode Franklin Pike and the railroad. Cheatham's Corps held the right of the line, which ran northeast about 2 miles to Rains' Hill. After the Confederate left was broken in the afternoon of Dec. 15, Lee's Corps fell back to high ground about 1.5 miles south.

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Lee's Corps held the right flank in the final stages of the battle, linking with Stewart to the west. It extended east, then south around Peach Orchard Hill. Violent attacks by Steedman's brigades were repulsed bloodily. Lee did not withdraw until the left and center of the Confederate line had collapsed.

Prior to the battle, Hood dispatched Gen. N.B. Forrest's cavalry and Gen. William B. Bate's infantry to Murfreesboro to tear up railroad track and unsuccessfully attack the Federal garrison at Murfreesboro, numbering 8,000 under Gen. Lovell H. Rousseau.

Bate returned to Cheatham's Corps and fought at Nashville. Forrest rejoined Hood during the retreat and performed valuable rear-guard action.

Travellers Rest (1799) was Hood's headquarters in the weeks prior to the battle. It has been restored and is open to the public, furnished in the pre-war time period of its original owner, Judge John Overton. (National Register of Historic Places.)

NASHVILLE 1862-65: City Under the Gun

Nashville, the capital of Tennessee, was occupied by the Union longer than any other major Southern city.

Civilians in Nashville were gripped by the "Great Panic" following the Feb. 16, 1862 surrender of Fort Donelson downstream on the Cumberland River. Loyalties were bitterly divided in the city, although most citizens were pro-Confederate.

On March 2, Union soldiers began streaming into Nashville after Confederate troops evacuated the city without firing a shot.

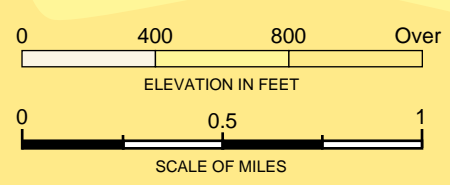
The Federals quickly began to build fortifications around the city, Fort Negley being the largest stone fortification built during the war. Nashville became the most heavily fortified city in North America, second only to Washington, D.C.

The State Capitol, a majestic example of Greek Revival stonework, became Fort Johnson, named after the former Governor from East Tennessee who ruled the occupied city and later became U.S. President after Lincoln's assassination.

Houses were commandeered for use by officers, and churches were converted into hospitals. Warehouses were constructed to house the vast stores of supplies coming up the Cumberland and by railroad, south from Louisville and east from the Johnsonville depot on the Tennessee River.

Citizens were forced to sign an Oath of Allegiance or suffer the consequences. Agents and speculators made fortunes on war goods. Prostitutes in vast numbers offered their services. Spies on both sides traveled through the enemy lines, while bands of Rebels attacked Union railroad trestles and foraging parties.

During the battle, Nashvillians watched from high ground, most hoping the Confederates could retake the city and force the Federals out. They were vastly disappointed.



Hood's Retreat

Along Franklin Pike near Brentwood, late in the evening of his decisive defeat at Nashville, Hood reorganized his army for withdrawal southward. Lt. Gen. Stephen D. Lee's Corps, supported by Chalmers' Cavalry Division, covered the withdrawal, fighting continuously until the army bivouacked near Spring Hill, 21 miles south, the night of Dec. 17.

The ragged and defeated Confederates finally reached safety by crossing the Tennessee River in

northern Alabama on December 26.

On Jan. 13, 1865, Hood resigned his command of the Army of Tennessee.

It has been estimated that Hood lost 2,300 men killed or wounded at Nashville, in addition to 8,500 taken prisoner. During the entire campaign, the army lost 23,500 of its 38,000 men.

It is estimated the Union suffered 6,000 casualties during the entire campaign.